

Observations of a State Highway Commissioner

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WORK OF NEEDS STUDY COMMITTEE PRAISED

The work done by the recent Highway Needs Study Committee was the most comprehensive outstanding job ever performed by a legislative study group in the history of our State. All of us in Indiana who are interested in highways are indebted to this group to an extent beyond our ability to express. In this same connection we are equally indebted to Professor Michael of Purdue for the untold hours of work he devoted to this needs study project and the professional advice and direction he gave it.

A Successful Legislative Program

I feel that it was these years of educational work carried on by this group up and down the State of Indiana that informed the public and achieved the public acceptance to needed gas and diesel tax increases and truck registration increases that made our recent legislative program in this connection successful to the point that we were able to achieve it.

While we did not get a whole loaf, we were able to secure legislation for the gas and diesel fuel increases as recommended by the Needs Study group and were partially successful in achieving truck increases. This should place us in a position to do a creditable job during the present four-year administration in constructing or at least getting under contract, the rebuilding and four-laning of the greater portion of the 157 miles of "killer" highways in Indiana.

* Steele was appointed chairman of the Indiana State Highway Commission in the latter part of 1968 by Governor Whitcomb. He has been connected with the State highway program directly and indirectly for a period of over 20 years. As executive secretary and administrative assistant to former Governor Ralph F. Gates, he worked rather closely with the State Highway Department at that time. Later he was a member of the Indiana State Senate and of the Indiana Legislative Advisory Commission—he was chairman of a special subcommittee which strongly pressed for improved State highway legislation.

Legislators Thanked

I want to also extend my sincere thanks to State Senator Dean Kruse, Chairman of Roads Committee in the Senate and Representative Stephen Ferguson, Chairman of the Roads Committee in the House of Representatives. They were both courteous and cooperative beyond the call of duty. Steve is one of my State Representatives so it was easy for me to pressure him. I could harrass him as Chairman of the State Highway Commission and also as a constituent. I have been connected with the legislature long enough to know when an outstanding job is done and both deserve the highest praise.

Organizations Thanked

I want to extend my thanks to the Indiana Highway Constructors Association and the Indiana Bituminous Association, the Indiana Mineral Aggregates group and the Indiana Equipment Manufacturers and Distributors and the other interested groups and trade associations who gave of their time and money to help achieve a large part of our legislative program in the recent session. Without their help, this success would have been doubtful.

DISTRIBUTION FORMULA POSSIBLY BEST

On the separate legislative act providing for the distribution formula as fixed by the Needs Study Committee, the State Highway Commission did not fare as well as the Needs Study group felt it should. Be that as it may, we do realize that counties and cities in Indiana and particularly the highly populated urban areas had extensive road and street problems and were also particularly in need of additional review. We made it a point not to fight these other groups and instead attempted to work with them on a fair basis and perhaps the formula that did result, is as fair as can be hoped for. I suppose the best attestation to this fact is that neither the State, the counties, or the cities were totally satisfied.

HIGHWAY COMMISSION PERSONNEL AND GOALS

As to the Highway Commission, it is my observation today that by and large, it is made up of dedicated and capable people. It is somewhat disturbing that most of our top engineers are advanced in years and are nearing, or soon will be nearing, retirement and we are not attracting young engineers to the extent desirable. It is my hope that during this administration we can take steps to make a career for these young qualified engineers in our State Highway Department more enticing and desirable.

This year our Indiana State Highway Commission is celebrating its 50th anniversary.

It is my understanding that the Purdue Road School goes back 50 years and I think this speaks for itself.

Indiana, its cities, towns, and counties are indebted to Purdue University for the leadership, education, and direction it has given our Indiana street and road problems far beyond our ability to comprehend. We are all deeply indebted to it.

The purpose of the Indiana State Highway Commission during the next four years shall be to give the citizens of Indiana the best highway program possible under existing revenues and to extend our co-operation to the cities and counties on the mutual road and highway problems to the fullest extent possible.